

Plays and players

An occasional paper written for Heritage Open Day, September 2020

Writer's note:

This paper and the associated document were prepared for the Heritage Open Day week for which the Lincolnshire theme was to be "The past and pastimes". The original intention had been that visitors to Lincoln Christ's Hospital School would be shown a powerpoint presentation on school productions from 1974 to 2019 i.e. the formation of the present school to the present day, visit the Garton Archive and then have the opportunity to do some spontaneous play-reading from scripts written for the Girls High School and Lincoln School in 1950 and 1953 respectively.

However, the Covid-19 pandemic and subsequent lockdown forced a change of plan. Heritage Open Day for many organisations became an online event and the decision was taken that Lincoln Christ's Hospital School would adopt this approach. The initial preparation for the powerpoint led to this article which was posted to the school website together with galleries of photos, posters, programmes and press cuttings.

The pandemic created challenges in the writing too. The Garton Archive contains very little material from the early years of Lincoln Christ's Hospital School described in Act One of this article. The passage of time means that some of the key people are no longer with us and I wasn't able to access sources such as Lincoln City Library and the Lincolnshire Echo back numbers, or confirm some permissions to use photos. The gallery sections should contain appropriate acknowledgements.

Inevitably there are gaps, but just as single photo of the 'Spacedust' cast of 1980 was first unearthed in 2020, it is likely that other material for other shows will appear as the months and years go by.

Another challenge was in who to name and therefore who to omit. With, let us say, 50 people involved in every production over 45 years, this would be an impossible roll call. Even mentioning all the directors and leading actors would create a significant list, and inevitably many key names would be missed out. Therefore the names of individuals have been largely confined to the Gallery pages through programme pages and newspaper reviews. In the context of the Heritage Open Day focus on "the past and pastimes" this underlines that school productions were essentially extra-curricular activities, pastimes if you like. However, engagement in performances was expected of members of staff in certain subject areas and latterly of pupils taking examination courses in Music and Drama. Having an annual production has become a strong indicator of a healthy school in the last three decades. Whatever the circumstances, the show must go on.

"The night was dark and stormy, the pirates sat round the fire. The lad piped up 'Cap'n, tell us a story'. And the Captain began ..."

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Prologue:

When the four non-selective predecessor schools merged in 1974, they brought with them many traditions including 'productions'.

Lincoln School seems to have had an annual play performed on the stage in what we now know as The Old Hall, opened after the Great War. Major productions included "Oedipus", "Our Town", "The Dumb Waiter" and "Journey's End". Several members of staff involved in the later years transferred their experience to the new school and early productions. These included David Sturman and Peter Fowler. There was also a strong tradition of performances in concerts as well as a house competition. There was an enormous range found in myriad books of one act plays. In 1949, as an example, I noted titles such as "A night at the Inn" by Lord Dunsany and "The dear departed" by Stanley Houghton. The content seems to have been largely anglo-centric with a clear moral tone.

A different output came from the Lincoln School Operatic Group led by Head of Music, Stuart Wilson. Its last performance was probably Stravinsky's "The Soldier's Tale" in 1972. The programme for "The Marriage of Figaro" one July notes the involvement of "*girls of the High School*" without whose "*enthusiasm in their spare time it would have been impossible to contemplate such as venture*". The High School had many moments of stagecraft over its 81 years including a production of "The Mikado" in 1920 and classics such as "Antigone", "Charley's Aunt" and "Murder in the Cathedral" as well as briefer, more obscure and less ambitious pieces such as "The Man in the Bowler Hat" (AA Milne) and "The Pie and the Patty Pan" (Beatrix Potter). It also produced a memorable home-grown Scrap Book of "Scenes Grave and Gay from the History of the School" from 1893 to 1950. There was a cast of 150 and many more "*laboured behind the scenes*", but no names of any of the authors, performers and back-stage team are published with the script.

Lincoln School also developed and acted its own script. "Elizabethan School Days" was written by staff member, the Reverend R.P.Baker, in celebration of the coronation of Queen Elizabeth II in 1953. The play recalled some events at Lincoln School in the reign of the first Elizabeth with plenty of relevance to the modern day – boisterous pupils, teachers with different levels of ability, a powerful headteacher, governors worried about money, 'town and gown' conflicts, and so on

The Scrap Book and 'Elizabethan School Days' have both been scanned and are now available in the Heritage Open Day section on the LCHS website for modern readers and perhaps actors to enjoy. Looking ahead I hope that it will be possible to write a much fuller illustrated narrative on productions in all four predecessor schools at some date in the future.

There were also productions in the schools on the St Giles estate. Research by Peter Harrod for Occasional Paper 22 from the Garton Archive has revealed, largely from logbooks, that there was 'music and a playlet' in 1934, and in 1942, during the heart of WW2, three plays were performed in the hall under the direction of Mr Sands. One of those was the trial scene from "The Merchant of Venice". We know that several other plays were performed at the schools over the years, including scenes from "A Midsummer Night's Dream" and nativity plays, but lack details, press-cuttings, programmes and photographs. We have several football team photos from St Giles Boys, and so hope that someone somewhere will have souvenirs of shows they were in. Any memories and relevant items will be warmly welcomed and included in a later edition of this paper

Act One: A new school showcasing many traditions from 'Twelfth Night' to 'My Fair Lady': 1975-1989

Setting the scene

When the new 12-18 comprehensive school finally opened on the Wragby Road site in mid-September 1974, two weeks later than scheduled because of building delays, much had changed. Two selective and two non-selective single-sex schools had merged to become Lincoln Christ's Hospital School. Four cultures had to become a fifth reflecting the very different demographic. Pupil numbers had rocketed from 600 to around 1500 with half of them girls. This story is told more fully elsewhere.

The merger had great relevance for school life not only in the formal curriculum but also in the extra-curricular world including school productions. And the buildings had changed. The 1930's hall had previously served multiple purposes of being the venue for all events including assemblies, gymnastics and performances, but now vast new edifices existed to the west, north and east of the 1905 Jacobean frontage designed by Leonard Stokes. A sports complex with both a new gymnasium and sports hall was at the 'Cathedral' end of the cloisters, while at the Carlyle Walk end there was a block containing accommodation for the Sixth Form, the kitchen, rooms for art, music and technology, and a new hall with a magnificent stage complete with lighting gallery and bleachers. However, despite the bleachers its capacity was less than the previous hall and its fitness for purpose further diminished by the main east-west corridor continuing from the cloisters and across the floor between the edge of the stage and the first row of any seating. Also windows high up on the west and east sides created challenges for black-out during the daytime. Nonetheless the performance space was, and perhaps still is, seen as the best in the city by the professionals and amateurs who have trodden its boards.

While the new facilities offered more potential, the former venue with its panelling and leaded windows was brutally treated in a drive to create more teaching space. The gallery was enclosed and became a lecture theatre. The space directly underneath became two small classrooms split by a central corridor. These rooms were cramped, stuffy, generally limited in light and air, and very echoey and noisy because of the thin floor of the lecture theatre, certainly the worst in the school. After about three decades the under-gallery space was re-formed to create one room with painted-out windows. It is known as 'The Cave' and is used by the Drama department for teaching. The two rooms left and right of the stage are now respectively used for school records and archives and as the Drama office. The hall itself is variously used for Drama classes, exams and also assemblies for a single year group, but very tight indeed if there are 240 pupils seated on chairs, a far cry from the glory days when the whole of Lincoln School could be accommodated there. On the plus side, the wooden panelling, the portrait of Miss Savill and honours boards remain and the observant visitor can see the brass plates in the floor to which gym apparatus was anchored and also the lines of the wall bars where daylight and sunshine have not bleached the panelling.

On stage at last

The dramatic personae of the early years have now bowed out and there are surprisingly few records covering the next 15 years as the four predecessor schools were gradually subsumed into one. 'The Lincolnian' was produced one last time, but there was no obvious central attempt to keep records beyond the legal minimum for the future. The day-to-day challenges inevitably and rightly took precedence. Also press coverage and scrutiny of education was much less intense than it is today. "*The secret garden of the curriculum*" first referred to by Minister Sir David Eccles in 1960 and then by Prime Minister James Callaghan in 1976 was very much the domain of teachers. Schools

were basically trusted to get on with things without intervention or the need to look over the parapet or display their wares in order to attract pupils. However, and very fortunately, items do survive, often in dusty folders wedged in stock rooms, stuck in drawers, stored in family attics or occasionally showcased in a picture frame, or perhaps a press-cutting. Since this research started at the beginning of 2020, there have in fact been several exciting moments when unexpected treasure has been unearthed e.g. a rehearsal and cast photographs, a programme from “Spacedust”, the LCHS-original 1980’s production and even a T-shirt from “West Side Story” with both the logo and the cast. Thank goodness for hoarders

The first production very understandably ploughed a familiar furrow, Shakespeare. David Sturman directed “Twelfth Night” with a small cast in March 1975, just two terms into the life of the new school. The performance was described as *“ably done and extremely enjoyable”* in the ‘Echo’ review by Peter Krafft who added that *“it is nothing short of a miracle that a play containing yards of often crude humour should be performed in front of an audience of adolescents without as much as a snigger in 2 ½ hours”*. Then as now, there is nothing to beat a live show. The gallery photos not only provide a snapshot of the clothes and hairstyles of the period, but also the new boiler house which apparently won a design award.

The following year saw the first of the blockbusters following the old maxim that the best way to get people interested in something is to get them involved. A large cast also tends to attract a larger audience and help the budget. “Oliver” is a modern classic. The show was first performed on the West End stage in 1960, followed by the film in 1968. It rapidly became a favourite in schools.

“Sweeney Todd”, again directed by David Sturman, was performed at the school in 1976 or 1977 as a stage play seen by the public in 1973, and so three years before Broadway hosted the musical. This was followed by “The Boy Friend” in 1978 in which the pupil cast was reinforced by teachers playing some of the more mature roles.

1980 was an extraordinary year with two productions. “Joseph and his amazing technicolour dreamcoat” was performed in Lincoln Cathedral.

And then came “Spacedust. A Musical Adventure in Time”, an LCHS original, again with a large cast. The main source for this paper is a recently rediscovered programme, described by its benefactor as *“a bit tatty and (possibly mouse-nibbled), but amazingly detailed”* – such disclosures are the essence of historical research CRW - *“Most of its ideas were by Ray Pulman, in his pomp in 1980. No score, as most of the parts were hand-written by Ed and Ray.”* The storyline followed three travellers, stranded in Space in 2180 AD, attempting to reach their home planet, Cygnus III. On their improbable journey, the trio encountered characters from Shakespeare, fairy tales and the rock and roll era with dance numbers and 16 songs.

The ambition of productions grew in another direction through Gilbert and Sullivan’s “The Mikado” in 1981. This memorably featured Senior Master, Ivan Sexton, and the most glorious and colourful costumes

When the writing of this paper started in mid-August 2020, there was very little information for the next three shows beyond the correspondence between Director of Music, Ed Korolyk, and the London agencies dealing with performing rights and the scripts. The writer hoped that someone somewhere might just have a treasure-chest of programmes, photos and more. I am still hoping!

“Guys and Dolls” was licensed for three nights in December 1983. One interesting feature is that at that time LCHS had no teacher of dance, a gap which was only remedied around the turn of the

century and so a professional choreographer was employed. A similar use of external support can be seen in handwritten lists of potential local musicians approached to work on other shows. There was a lot of mutual support between teachers of music in several local schools over this period.

There were several attempts to obtain a licence for “Grease” but this didn’t happen until 1991. LCHS was offered alternatives such as “Ulysses”, “Wurzel Gummidge”, “Peter Pan” and “The Frankenstein Monster Show”, but for one reason or another these didn’t appeal. However, “West Side Story” certainly did, and not just to Lincoln Christ’s Hospital School. A letter from Josef Weinberger Ltd on 10th June 1986 mentioned that there was a shortage of band parts *“because you have chosen to do the show at the same time as practically every other school in the country”*. In the event more parts were imported from the United States, but even so the LCHS team and experienced musicians only had one month to bring the show to the Main Hall stage. For this writer, then a mere twenty months into his twenty-one years as deputy head, this was an eye-opening few weeks with an intense period of rehearsals, set construction, costuming, and everything else which goes into a production.

This first show after David Cox became headmaster in September 1985 drew the following response from Steve Race, a former pupil, brother of the then chairman, Philip Race, and most relevantly the veteran presenter of radio and television’s ‘My Music’ panel game between 1967 and 1994. Over 500 shows were broadcast for which he apparently wrote all the questions. In a typed letter of acceptance on 16th October 1986, he commented:

“I can still hardly believe it that my old school is tackling “West Side Story”. In my day we might just have managed to put on a simplified version of “The Wind in the Willows”, but I realise that times have changed. Just how much they have changed will no doubt be apparent on 12th December. I’m sure it will be a great success”

And it was! “The Wind in The Willows” was eventually performed in 2008, but more immediately “West Side Story” played for three nights in December 1986. From the archival perspective, the worry about having nothing else to mention in this section was lifted by a wet August pre-bank holiday Friday email from a former colleague with photos of his T-shirt, emblazoned with the show logo on the front and the cast list on the back.

Twenty-seven months after “West Side Story” in March 1989 there was another huge production, this time “My Fair Lady”. Remarkably, there appear to be no records of this in the LCHS archives or elsewhere although the end of lockdown might eventually make sources more accessible. This shortage of content was rarely apparent when researching the next three decades

Act Two: A dynamic decade from ‘Grease’ to ‘Annie’ 1990-1999

The production of “Grease” in December 1991 was epic, and not just because the stage crew *“twice managed to get Kenickie’s car on stage without any discernible hitch and without the least noise”* according to the ‘Echo’ reviewer, Joe Conway. It oiled the wheels for the next three decades when there was at least one, often two and occasionally three productions. Some were big cast, whole school numbers, but others focused on particular age groups e.g. examination candidates’ ‘assessment’ performances in November or March, and Key Stage 3 pupils in July. 2020, the year of Covid-19, is the first year since 1991 in which there has been no production.

“Grease” was hugely successful for many reasons. The Pink Ladies, the Burger Palace Boys and other leads strutted their stuff with aplomb backed up a chorus of nearly fifty, a dozen in the Band and fifty more backstage and front of house. There were great music, show-stopping, foot-tapping routines, slick scene changes, humour and a flexible set. It was a genuine school production in every sense bringing the “High School Musical” to north Lincoln. It might also have been the first production to which we invited pupils from contributory schools to join us at mid-morning

rehearsals where the some of the greatest hits in the show were played to a live audience for the first time.

The following year saw the first 'Snow White and Rose Red'. There was another large cast and large audiences, swelled by the first group from our new partners in Kutna Hora to visit Lincoln very soon after the end of Communist rule. The 40 pupils and staff from what was still Czechoslovakia travelled here in a coach on a 28 hour trip across Germany and Belgium. Budget airlines were still to come. What the Czech visitors then made of the humour and cultural conventions of a British show with panto elements has been lost in the mists of time. Over the decade there were other popular shows staged to involve large numbers including "Bugsy Malone", "Jack and the Beanz-Talk", an original piece, "Alice's Adventures in Wonderland", "The Little Shop of Horrors", "Return to the Forbidden Planet" and "Annie". Band members under the leadership of Ed Korolyk also benefitted from the three music exchanges with Canton High School, Pennsylvania towards the end of the decade with tunes and techniques traded in both directions, and with additional input from Bernd Wolff and the German ROTA partner school, Gymnasium Waldstrasse in Hattingen, and much overlap with Lincoln's "Jazz Vehicle" directed by John Crouch. The commitment of staff and pupils was huge. As a personal aside the writer's 50th birthday was made especially memorable on the great day. As I ate alone in the Main Hall at the end of lunch while the tables were being cleared, his regular slot, the stage doors opened to reveal the whole band with several singers in costume who performed a few numbers from "Forbidden Planet" before scurrying off to afternoon lessons. A supreme moment!

However, amidst the showmanship the more traditional / classical repertoire was not ignored with Shakespeare's "The Taming of the Shrew", Brecht's "Caucasian Chalk Circle" and Jonson's "The Alchemist" as well as a revival of "The Boy Friend" first performed on the LCHS stage in the 1970's.

The school even 'borrowed' a large part of Lincoln Cathedral for a few days in July 1994 for a much more ambitious production than the annual Foundation Service for Year 7 pupils or the Carol Service. Britten's "Noye's Fludde" involved some very experienced adult musicians, LCHS pupils and significant numbers from Ermine Juniors, Monks Abbey, Myle Cross, Saxilby, St Faith and St Martin, and Westgate Juniors. It was an extraordinary undertaking.

Act Three: A magnificent new millennium from 'The Wiz' to lockdown: 2000-2020

In a manner of speaking the new millennium brought 'something old, something new, something borrowed, something blue(s)'.

'Something old' could be said to include the revivals of the most popular shows of earlier years such as "Bugsy Malone", "Return to the Forbidden Planet", "Grease", "Oliver", "Alice's Adventures in Wonderland" and "The Little Shop of Horrors". A revival of a sort was "The Wiz" first performed in 2000 and then again as "The Wizard of Oz"

'Something new' is an ongoing feature of the repertoire even though some were standards simply not previously selected for the Lincoln Christ's Hospital School stage. "Midsummer Night's Dream" and "Romeo and Juliet" were performed in full, but there was ambition and innovation in 2001 with "The Bard's Greatest Hits" with selections from five of Shakespeare's better-known plays. These were "Midsummer Night's Dream", "Romeo and Juliet", "Hamlet", "Macbeth" and "Much Ado About Nothing", the range allowing several groups of pupils the opportunity to perform to adults in the evening as well as over 1000 children from different schools in the morning sessions. The anthology included scenes in contemporary dress, bicycles and a dance number to a Michael Jackson tune, all part of making Tudor language and culture less distant and more accessible to twenty-first century youngsters.

Other first-time productions of well-known scripts requiring large casts included "Wind in the Willows", the show which Steve Race had mentioned two decades earlier. Others were "Charlie and the Chocolate Factory", "Cinderella", "A Christmas Carol" and "The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time". Very differently there were plays studied and performed by A-level students for external assessment. These included Brecht's "The Good Woman of Setzuan", "Marat/Sade" and "Our Country's Good". The range is remarkable.

In addition to the examination requirements of older pupils there were also significant steps to provide annual opportunities for Key Stage Three in July, some directed by seniors as part of their own development. These not only included well-known work by Roald Dahl and the "Just So Stories", but also the less known with productions such as "Ash Girl" and "Skellig"

"Junk Band" sounds as if it would meet 'something borrowed' requirement, but the heading could also be used to embrace a number of showcase events over the last thirty years, which have engaged hundreds of pupils. Back in the day these would have been called concerts, the preserve of well-groomed and highly trained musicians on a taut programme of ancient and more modern music, but since 1974 these have developed considerably. The emergence of post-war 'teenage' culture and the influence of the 1960's. The changing curriculum gave individuals more self-confidence to play, sing, dance, perform and enjoy the stage. Internal LCHS events such as "Take Off The Pops" were overwhelming in their popularity. The bleachers in the Main Hall were never more packed than on Finals Nights

The link to 'something blue(s)' is even more contrived. The most obvious link is to the New Orleans Night in July 2006 although this event was focused on fund-raising for long-term social reconstruction projects after the tragic impact of Hurricane Katrina in August 2005. However, the dreadful weather of December 2010 might also qualify when heavy snow forced a postponement of "Midsummer's Night's Dream" to the following week! In contrast the chilly sounding Snowglobe events were very different. Over five nights there were 50 performances. Some were assessment pieces for GCSE, A-level and BTec students. There was also an international theme reflecting the increase in number of LCHS pupils who didn't speak English at home and/or were born outside the United Kingdom, approximately 150 out of 1300 in this period, mostly from eastern Europe but overall from about 30 countries. One student commented to the "Echo" that *"having do many performances in one night is really good for the audience because they get so many completely original pieces"*.

And rather differently, away from the onstage entertainment, there has also been solemnity and respect, notably through the 2014 World War One Centenary production and also the revival of the Two Minutes Silence on the school day closest to 11th November. Moving the school war memorial from a cramped corner outside the Old Hall to the cloisters, a project driven by Deputy Head, Freddie White, in itself gave the Remembrance events more relevance, in turn enhanced by an annual ceremony on the adjacent front lawn attended by the Sixth Form with readings, wreaths and a bugler sounding 'Last Post'. This ceremony and its positioning at the front of what was the 4th Northern General Hospital a century ago are also an annual reminder to the school of our own heritage and the importance of working together. Not only are teamwork and awareness of others key features of daily life and school routines, but also, returning to the theme of this paper, an vital element in the success of any piece of theatre.

Epilogue

The reader will have noticed how the commentary has become shorter as the chronology has approached modern times. In live theatre, the later acts are often shorter than the first because the explanation and scene-setting are more complicated than the actual denouement. However, this is not the case here.

There are two reasons for the more limited writing. The first is that there is much more publicly or easily available material on the later years, especially in this age of digital records and now social media. Countless photos and comments are 'out there'. This writer grew up in an age of handwritten records, carbon paper and cameras taking black and white photos on film which had to be taken to the chemists for processing. Also, there wasn't the same priority for schools to be competitive and showcase their work outside their immediate and generally rigid catchment areas. And of course, as the years roll by, memories fade and sources disappear. Therefore, in compiling this record, the period from 1974 to 1989 was where the emphasis was placed in order to harvest information before it is lost irretrievably

In the last three decades recruitment in an open market has made accountability and transparency assume a higher importance. Evidence and evaluation are required in all areas of school life. That said, even the OFSTED inspectors increasingly focus on the overall pupil experience. However, this paper is not the place for a discussion of national policies, shifting sands and moving goalposts.

The second consideration relates to interpretation. There is a school of thought that a definitive study of the context and consequences of any event can be achieved very quickly so that those involved can move onto the next one at great speed. Instant history is a contradiction. His (or her) story has to be written over time. With this in mind, it will be a future archivist writing later this century who will be better placed to assess the bigger picture, albeit armed with as much information as the Garton Archive and other sources can accumulate and reasonably retain.

And finally, looking ahead, we can ask a different question for which a soothsayer may be needed. Will an Act IV be added to the story we have started here, or will there be a sequel of a very different kind?

The second half of the second decade of the third millennium was an increasingly challenging period for school departments not classified as 'core' by whatever criteria. Before the spring of 2020 the long hands of Health and Safety, vicious budget cuts, external judgement by results and GDPR had already combined to limit many more imaginative opportunities for learners and teachers alike such as activities involving improvisation, spontaneity, proximity, close teamwork, shows, most overseas visits and so on. And now we have Covid, Brexit and the climate emergency. These are difficult days. However, the creative spirit being as it is will ensure that performances of one sort or another continue. Somehow, somewhere "*the show will go on*". Let us hope that it will soon be possible to scatter some sort of modern magic "*Spacedust*" across the stage at Lincoln Christ's Hospital School to remove all the current barriers to large scale live performance so that today's actors and production teams can "*break a leg*" and follow the magnificent large-scale spectacles of yesteryear.

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About the writer: Chris Williams is an Honorary Archivist and was a teacher of history and Deputy Headteacher at LCHS from 1986 to 2007 with a pair of three months periods as Headteacher. As a cub scout, schoolboy, university student and probationer teacher, he was involved in a lot of plays, and even taught one period of drama per week at LCHS to a Year 8 class when, as timetabler, he couldn't find anyone else for that slot. During his deputy headship he was largely involved in the press publicity and negotiating solutions and crowd control when dress rehearsals and primary performances meant that the Main Hall couldn't be used at morning break. He currently works for the school and a number of organisations as a consultant on international school partnerships.

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Appendix A: LCHS Plays and players list since 1974

Act One: A new school showcasing many traditions from 'Twelfth Night' to 'My Fair Lady': 1975-1989

March 1975 Twelfth Night
March 1976 Oliver
1976 or 1977 Sweeney Todd
1978 The Boy Friend
1980 Joseph and his amazing technicolour dreamcoat (Lincoln Cathedral)
1980 Spacedust (Original)
1981 The Mikado
December 1983 Guys and Dolls
December 1986 West Side Story
March 1989 My Fair Lady

Act Two: A dynamic decade from 'Grease' to 'Annie' 1990-1999

December 1991 Grease
December 1992 Snow White and Rose Red
March 1993 The Taming of the Shrew
December 1993 Buggy Malone
1994 The Caucasian Chalk Circle
July 1994 Noye's Fludde (Lincoln Cathedral) with Ermine Juniors, Monks Abbey, Myle Cross, Saxilby, St Faith and St Martin, and Westgate
December 1994 Jack and the Beanz-Talk (Original)
December 1995 Alice's Adventures in Wonderland
1996 The Alchemist
December 1996 Little Shop of Horrors
December 1997 Return to The Forbidden Planet
December 1998 The Boy Friend
December 1999 Annie

Act Three: A magnificent new millennium from 'The Wiz' to lockdown: 2000-2019

December 2000 The Wiz
December 2001 The Bard's Greatest Hits
November 2002 The Good Woman of Setzuan
January 2003 Cinderella

November 2003 Antigone
2004 The Three Musketeers
November 2004 Marat/Sade (Sixth Form drama)
December 2004 Bussy Malone
December 2005 Return to The Forbidden Planet
July 2006 New Orleans
December 2006 Snowglobe
December 2007 Snowglobe 2 (Sixth Form)
July 2008 Wind in the Willows
2008 Animal Farm
December 2008 Grease
July 2009 Charlie and the Chocolate Factory
December 2009 Alice's Adventures in Wonderland
July 2010 Ash Girl
December 2010 Oberon's Circus aka Midsummer Night's Dream
July 2011 Skellig
December 2011 Oliver
July 2012 Just So Stories
December 2012 The Wizard of Oz
July 2013 Junk Band
December 2013 The Little Shop of Horrors
July 2014 World War One Centenary Performance
December 2014 A Christmas Carol
July 2015 Matilda
December 2015 LCHS will rock you
December 2016 That's How We Roald Dahl
December 2017 Romeo and Juliet
December 2018 The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-time; Our Country's Good
July 2019 Summer Showcase
December 2019 LCHS Night at the Musicals Showcase
23 March 2020 Lockdown

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Appendix B: Paul Cavanagh, Design Technology teacher and very regular set builder (1984-2019)

Setting the scene:

When collecting material and writing this paper, I was aware of gaps in the content, and so asked former colleagues to look into their memorabilia boxes or dig into their memories. The response was great – and I already know that there is more to come. Most of the 'late entries' could be incorporated into the main text, but this contribution by Paul Cavanagh was so lengthy, personal and unusual it deserves to stand on its own. Enjoy. CRW

"Although I joined the staff in 1984 the first play I was involved with was "West Side Story" in 1986. George Scarisbrick (Drama) as if I could help back-stage. With a crew of helping little hands I built the set during weekends. I then helped out rigging the lights with Stuart Mitchell (science). Tony was played by Tony Bodger and I needed to arrange a gunshot noise as the cap gun they would use just didn't supply the required noise. I tried a thunder flash which was much better but a bit of a risk if it wasn't contained. I decided to remotely set the thunder flash off in a metal dust bin with lid. This worked really well to the point I remember an elderly lady nearly had a heart attack in the front row.

The opening scene which is a rumble between the Sharks and the Jets we filled the stage with smoke before the curtain opened then two motor bikes were ridden on stage, one from either side, with headlights on. The main stage lights were off giving a very atmospheric start. I had been told there was no way I could get motorbikes on stage, so long before the event we had wheeled them through the art rooms and hidden in plain view, a technique I was to use again for another play.

Problem-solving, scrounging and improvisation happened all the time. When Ivan Sexton, Senior Master, broke his swivel office chair, he asked if I could use any parts before it went in the skip. The swivel mechanism and part of the base I refashioned into a follow spotlight which was attached to the balcony above the bleachers. It may even still be there.

“My Fair Lady” was an easy set to light as there were only two main light sets one for inside and another for outside. The set again was a simple set to build. There was a study set built to the rear of the stage which a mid-curtain would hide when an outdoor scene was required.

Another great play I remember well is the 1991 version of “Grease”. George had asked me could I build a cardboard or wooden car that the actors could sit in, to which I replied why not use a real car, George just laughed and walked away. I acquired a Mark 1 Honda Civic from Baumber scrapyards. The kind man even delivered it to school free of charge. You might ask why a Honda Civic, well it was the only car in the yard that would go through the smallest door on my planned route, that door being the double doors which enter the main hall by what is now the super loos. Firstly, with the help of Morgan Ward (a junior judo champion at the time) we got the car into DT by the doors that enter the now hardwood store. There the two of us spent a couple of weekends removing things like the engine and all the glass. We fitted a length of 4x2 to support the lower bulkhead and then removed the roof. The following Monday after school I had arranged for a small army of sixth form helpers. We pushed the car out of DT and down the car park towards Wragby Road. The car was then pushed along the footpath towards the main school entrance. Once through the car park we put two builders’ planks on the step up into the cloisters. Then through the crossroads door heading towards a few tricky manoeuvres. The car needed to be perfectly lined up to go through the doors into the Main Hall and down the stairs. There was only 1cm to spare between the doors on each side and the car body. The builders’ planks were carefully put on the Main Hall stairs and I sat in the car to steer it and operate the brakes. The lads pushed the car very slowly and through the door. As we got onto the ramp I carefully operated the brakes so that I didn’t end up in the kitchen. That was the difficult manoeuvre done a simple turn round in the Main Hall was required. Again the planks were put onto the stage steps. At this time Chris Williams walked through the hall and asked what we were doing. I remember him saying “*I don’t want to watch this*” and left. We attached a tow rope to the front of the car. My helpers pulled on the rope whilst others pushed it and in no time the car was on the stage. Papier maché 1950’s wings were fitted to the car and flames painted on the front wings. The car was kept on stage and disguised in the corner with a wall on wheels I had built in front of it. A reporter came to photograph the cast and asked how the car was put on stage between scenes and could not believe it was hidden and just pushed out when needed. The car was collected after the production by the scrapyards owner and sat for several years on his front lawn for his grandchildren to play in.

“Buggy Malone” is another one I remember from the fun of building the foam guns. These were toy machine guns that I made an attachment to hold some silly string cans. I attached a mechanism which pressed the button on top of the can when the trigger was pressed. Everyone wanted one of these guns – looking back maybe I should have gone into mass production and made more than the required eight.

I remember building a collapsible ark for “Noye’s Fludde” with Glen Thomson and taking it to the Cathedral to set up, getting all that plywood in a mini bus was interesting

“Little Shop of Horrors” sticks in my memory because I had to build a plant that a small Sixth Former could get in. A strong Sixth Former and I carried this on stage each night dressed as caretakers. People wondered how the plant moved not realising that there was someone inside. This trick was used again when I built the world’s biggest slug for “Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland” but this time as it was so large it was put on casters.

After these great plays, the stage set became much more minimalistic only requiring props to be made and lighting mainly due to budget restraints”

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Everyone who has ever performed in, made possible or attended an LCHS production

Occasional Paper no.53” The Girls’ High School “Scrap Book”
The script:

Occasional Paper no. 57 “Elizabethan School Days”
The script:

And finally, as mentioned previously, this is only a first edition of this narrative. Please send corrections, additions, comments and memorabilia to Chris Williams c/o The Garton Archive at LCHS or by email to cwilliams@lchs.eu

Chris Williams

11th September 2020